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SUBJECT: EGYPT PRESSING FORWARD ON NILE BASIN INITIATIVE

REF: STATE 190874

Sensitive but unclassified. Not for internet distribution.

¶1. (SBU) Summary. The Government of Egypt is a strong supporter of the Nile Basin Initiative (NBI) as a tool for cooperative management of water resources and is leading efforts to finalize a framework agreement. In January, the GOE will host an NBI council meeting aiming to ratify the framework agreement, though some issues are pending. GOE contacts expressed enthusiasm for a multi-country International Visitors Leadership Program (IVLP) for NBI countries, modeled after a 2006 Egyptian single country program. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) On December 10, Econoff met with Dr. Abdel Fattah Metawie, Chairman of the Nile Water Sector at the Ministry of Water Resources and Irrigation who expressed his strong belief in the NBI's "ability to bring together people to work on common issues." Metawie said Egypt intends to host a high-level meeting in Cairo in mid-January, and is confident that "the time is ripe" for ratification of the framework agreement. This meeting, originally scheduled for mid-December, was pushed back due to scheduling conflicts. Metawie said riparian countries have been "working together closely" and "made many compromises" in preparation to ratify the framework agreement.

¶3. (SBU) Water ministers from Egypt, Sudan, and Ethiopia will meet on December 20 in Khartoum to try to resolve the issue of "previous agreements," one of two core issues in the framework agreement. According to Metawie, all riparian countries, except for Ethiopia, have agreed to the framework's provisions on how to replace old standing bilateral and multilateral treaties, an issue which is now being dubbed "water security." The goal of the Khartoum meeting is to convince Ethiopia to accept the revised provisions of water security. The other outstanding issue is "prior notification," or alerting downstream countries of changes in the Nile flow. Metawie said that some aspects of the texts on prior notification are still being negotiated keeping in mind "how to fulfill the interests of all."

¶4. (U) In 2006, with the coordination of Dr. Metawie, post launched a single country International Visitors Leadership

Program (IVLP) to send mid-level Egyptian hydraulic engineers to the U.S. to visit various water research stations and to study our water agreements with Mexico and Canada. The candidates are scheduled to go to the U.S. in February. Metawie informed us that technical experts from Ethiopia, Egypt and Sudan recently had a similar successful visit to West Africa to examine transboundary water issues in the Senegal River. Metawie enthusiastically supported the idea of a regional IVLP program for NBI countries, sending two to three working level NBI engineers from each member country to the US for a several week IVLP course. Post welcomes feedback about this idea from both other NBI posts and the Department.

15. (SBU) Comment: Egypt is clearly committed to the NBI and is taking an active leadership role in ensuring that the framework is ratified. While GOE contacts boast about Egypt's ability to store a substantial amount of Nile water in Lake Nasser as insurance for reduced flow levels, they nonetheless recognize the NBI is crucial to ensure a continuous supply of water to Egypt. End comment.
JONES